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PACOM FOR J2 AND FPA HUSO

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR PACOM DEPUTY J2 TOM MCNAMARA

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Alex A. Arvizu. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

11. (C) Summary. Mr. McNamara, your trip to Bangkok will allow you to observe the difficulties the Thai military face in sharing intelligence and information. A lack of basic analytical skills coupled with information firewalls between the services and with other agencies hampers the Thai military's ability to collect and analyze information and share useful intelligence with other agencies and friendly countries. Several Thai officers acknowledge the problems that exist and want to work with us to improve intelligence capabilities. Your interlocutors will express a desire to have more U.S. training and we see opportunities to build closer links between the Thai Army and USARPAC. Thailand affords the United States a unique platform in Asia. Congress recently approved our implementing an ambitious program in Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka designed to improve our ability to monitor ship traffic on the Andaman Sea and in the Strait of Malacca to intercept suspect vessels. Our largest exercise, Cobra Gold, is America's only annual joint/combined multilateral training exercise in the Asia Pacific Region and now includes the active participation of Japan, Singapore and Indonesia. Thai troops deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq and we are working closely with the Thai to make them better able to address separatist elements in the Muslim majority South. We are also working with U.S. Embassies in the region to better address counter terrorism throughout SE Asia. Our IMET program is a major success -- senior leaders in all the services are graduates. END SUMMARY.

#### THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

12. (C) Bilateral relations with Thailand are very good. The goodwill generated by America's quick and massive response to the December 26 2004 tsunami was palpable. Thailand is a Treaty Ally and has been firmly supportive of the International War on Terror and has participated in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). American businesses have over \$20 billion in direct investment in Thailand. The United States is Thailand's largest export market and its second-largest foreign investor.

13. (C) Nonetheless, there are points of friction. Human rights remains a key concern. On October 25, 2004, poorly trained Thai military and civilian security forces forced nearly 1,300 Thai Muslim protesters into trucks to be transported to a military base nearly three hours away. 78 protesters died en route. Our protests over Thai Police

involvement in approximately 1,300 extrajudicial killings during the 2003 Thai "war on drugs," rankles the Thai Government. Likewise, Thailand's policy of "constructive engagement" with the military junta in Burma and provision of economic assistance to Rangoon is a source of continuing frustration for us. The Thai government supports democracy in Burma but maintains, not altogether convincingly, that engagement with the SPDC is the only realistic approach it has to make progress on the major cross-border flows of refugees, illegal economic migrants, and methamphetamines it faces from Burma.

#### THE OVERALL SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

14. (C) The U.S.-Thai security relationship is based on over 50 years of close cooperation. Thai soldiers, sailors and airmen participated in the Korean and Vietnamese Conflicts and Thai peacekeepers served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thailand is the fourth largest participant in the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Thailand's willingness to allow the United States to use Utapao Naval Air Station as the hub for our regional tsunami assistance program was key to making Operation Unified Assistance a success. In fact, PACOM recently designated Utapao as the most important Cooperative Security Location (CSL) in the Asia Pacific Region. While we avoid using the term "CSL" with the Thai due to their sensitivities about bases, Utapao remains vital to our interests in the region. In your meetings with Thai officials, you will want to note the overall strength of the relationship -- highlighting our history and underscoring the importance of our tsunami cooperation, exercise program, increased tempo of USN ship visits (most recently, the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group), and cooperation in the War on Terrorism.

#### THE POLITICAL SITUATION

15. (SBU) In 2001, telecommunications multimillionaire Thaksin (Prime Minister TOCK-SIN) Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party won a decisive victory on a populist platform of economic growth and development. Thaksin was reelected in February 2005, winning 377 out of 500 seats in the Parliament. Following allegations of corruption of the Prime Minister, peaceful anti-government demonstrations grew as thousands marched in the streets of Bangkok to demand Thaksin's resignation. Thaksin dissolved the Parliament in February 2006 and declared snap elections in April. The opposition boycotted the April elections, leading to a political stalemate. Following Royal intervention, the judiciary annulled the April election and new elections are expected to take place in October or shortly thereafter. Protesters have not returned to the streets and the Thai military has not intervened. Notably, Army CINC General Sonthi Boonyaratglin has been praised for his professional and apolitical handling of the military throughout the impasse. The government remains in caretaker status.

#### COUNTERTERRORISM AND SOUTHERN THAILAND

16. (C) Southern Thailand, in particular the southernmost Muslim majority provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, has experienced episodic violence since it was incorporated into the Siamese Kingdom in 1902. However, since January 2004, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the level of violence. Press reports indicate that over 1,300 persons have been killed either by militants or by security forces during this period. Local Muslim separatist militants have attacked symbols of Thai and Buddhist authority, civilians, and local citizens suspected of collaborating with the Government. There continue to be daily incidents of violence. In March 2005, Thaksin appointed a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) headed by highly respected former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun to look for alternative solutions to the long-running insurgency. The NRC published its recommendations in June but the Government has not actively sought to implement them.

17. (C) Southern separatists direct their anger at the

government in Bangkok, not at the United States. Since a U.S. presence or perception of U.S. involvement in the South could redirect that anger towards us and link it to the international jihadist movement -- a link that is currently absent -- we ensure that any offers of assistance or training pass the "location and label" test. Put simply, we keep U.S. military personnel away from the far South and we make sure that we do not label any assistance or training as directly linked to the southern situation. Likewise, we work to avoid feeding rampant, outlandish speculation that we are somehow fomenting the violence in the South in order to justify building permanent bases -- a very sensitive issue in Thailand. We do not want to jeopardize our access to key military facilities in Thailand like Utapao Naval Air Station.

#### REGIONAL MARITIME SECURITY

18. (C) A key U.S. objective in the region is to improve Maritime Security. We are working closely with PACOM to encourage Thailand and others to support the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI). Working with PACOM, PACFLT and Washington, we recently won approval to implement an ambitious project aimed at promoting domain awareness in the Andaman Sea. This project is a layered approach to assist the Thai military secure territorial waters while also providing coverage of the northern shipping lanes feeding into the Strait of Malacca. It will combine a High Frequency Radar capable of reaching Sumatra, with a constellation of overlapping x-band radars to provide radar coverage of the waters off the west coast of Thailand. The initiative would also improve the Royal Thai Navy's interdiction capabilities and has the potential to be linked to other facilities in the region. We are working closely with U.S. Embassies in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines to create a regional network aimed at improving maritime security throughout the region.

#### MILITARY COOPERATION

19. (C) Perhaps due to their lack of a colonial heritage, Thai leaders are far more willing to host multilateral exercises than are others countries in Asia. Unlike Japan, which only hosts annual bilateral exercises due to legal prohibitions over collective security, or Australia, which avoids multilateral exercises so as not to "dumb down" its own training opportunities, the Royal Thai Government supports multilateral exercises as a way to show regional leadership. So long as our concepts are properly sold to Thai military and political leaders, we should be able to continue to modify exercises to meet our regional security objectives -- including an ability to establish a near-continuous presence in the region.

10. (C) We conduct a wide range of major exercises and training programs with Thailand each year, including Cobra Gold. Cobra Gold 2006 included almost 7,000 U.S. troops working together with Thai counterparts in field training exercises ranging from Military Operations in Urban Terrain and Air Assault Operations to Naval Special Forces protecting offshore natural gas platforms. The Command Post Exercise included participation by U.S., Thai, Japanese, Singaporean and Indonesian forces and focused on peace keeping operations. Cobra Gold in the coming years will be a centerpiece of our Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), designed to train 15,000 regional peacekeepers by 2010. As mentioned, Utapao, the Thai Navy Air Base used as the primary staging area for U.S. disaster relief efforts in the region following the December 2004 tsunami, has long been a critical support hub for U.S. aircraft transiting the region. Over 420 DOD aircraft use it each year. Our largest air exercise, Cope Tiger, involves Thailand, the United States and Singapore. USN aircraft from the USS Abraham Lincoln participated in Cope Tiger in 2005 while the Lincoln was stationed off of Aceh during Operation Unified Assistance. We have also been working closely with PACFLT to give our major naval exercise, CARAT, a more regional flavor in the coming years.

## THE ROLE OF CHINA AND INDIA IN THE REGION

¶11. (C) Southeast Asia continues to feel the rising influence of China and India. While emphasizing the vital role of the U.S. in the region -- and Thailand's desire to intensify U.S. engagement -- Thai leaders also focus on developing stronger relations with the two regional powers. Bangkok views both countries as sources of unlimited consumer demand and hope to conclude Free Trade Agreements with both nations. It surprises many visitors from Washington to learn that the Thai military has a number of Chinese weapons systems in its arsenal. While Thai military links with the United States are deeper and far more apparent than Sino-Thai links, China's growing influence in Thailand and Southeast Asia is evident in business, the arts, the media and the military. The PLA Navy has close links with the RTN and recently conducted a major ship visit to Phuket. After jointly holding a limited naval exercise in the Andaman Sea last fall, Thailand and China are exploring conducting joint SAR exercises. The RTN has acquired several ships from China over the past decade. China is refurbishing tanks and air defense equipment provided to Thailand in the late 1980's. Mil-to-mil exchanges between China and Thailand have expanded in recent years as has the number of bilateral military VIP visits.

## THAI MILITARY STRUCTURE

¶12. (C) The relative power and influence of the Royal Thai Army (RTA) dwarfs the other services. As such, the Royal Thai Army Commander, GEN Sonthi, traditionally wields more real power than the Supreme Commander. Thailand's armed forces, which had a history of interfering in the country's politics, have not done so since 1992 and appear to be reconciled to constitutional roles of defense and security. Their exposure to U.S. civil-military values through their extensive participation in IMET training deserves some credit for this transformation of their attitude towards democracy.

## THE ROLE OF THE ARMY

¶13. (C) The Royal Thai Army (RTA) is a legacy force faced with serious modernization issues. Although 30 years have passed, the RTA is still primarily designed to defeat the large conventional threat that Vietnam represented in the mid-1980's. On paper, the RTA would seem to possess the capability to defeat a large conventional attack -- it seems to possess an impressive number of main battle tanks, TOW missiles, and helicopters. Digging deeper, however, one quickly discovers real equipment problems. 80 of Thailand's 100 M60A3 main battle tanks are inoperable, TOW missiles are past their useful life expectancy and, at any given time, only 30 of the RTA's 96 UH-1 helicopters are operational.

¶14. (C) Much of this decline in effectiveness is due to the budget constraints that were imposed from 1997-2001 after the Asian Financial Crisis. Since that time, budgets have increased slightly, but not to pre-1997 levels. Accordingly, the RTA must selectively choose how to modernize. Serious corruption in the procurement process is still widespread -- and acknowledged by many Thai officers. Consequently, the RTA relies on JUSMAGTHAI and the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system for many of their high-profile procurement programs.

¶15. (C) The RTA's transformation vision, unpublished and informal as it is, is to become lighter and more mobile with upgraded C4I systems that will make it more agile operationally. On the C4I front, much work remains. The RTA HQ and subordinate commands use commercial dial-up Internet services and email accounts, if they use email at all. However, they do have VTC capability and use it frequently.

¶16. (C) The RTG's CT effort in the South has been plagued by Thaksin repeatedly changing his policies and lead agencies. Shortly after taking power, Thaksin decided to dissolve the joint civilian-police-military Task Force which since the 1980s had successfully contained the separatist-related

violence. The loss of that coordinating body increased the natural propensity of the Thai bureaucracy to stovepipe information and not cooperate operationally. The problems caused by this lack of coordination have been compounded by the constant shifting of both the civilian and military leadership responsible for the South. In addition, Thaksin has often set unrealistic deadlines for his deputies to "solve" the southern problem and has been inconsistent in his policy statements, creating a situation where the operational leadership has a weak mandate and lack of strategic focus. Now, he finally appears settled on Army CINC GEN Sonthi (who is a Muslim with a Special Forces Background) as his chief military representative. Sonthi recently assured the Ambassador that the Army was rebuilding its intelligence and political network in the South, which is a good sign. Nonetheless, there is little guarantee that the Government won't switch course again in response to an actual or perceived setback.

¶17. (C) While the RTA has a long history working with the U.S. Army, recently we have also been working with MARFORPAC and III MEF to improve links between the U.S Marine Corps and the RTA. In many ways, our Marines are ideal training partners for the RTA and field exercises in Thailand afford our Marines many opportunities they don't have elsewhere in Asia. We will host the USS Essex Amphibious Assault Ship during Cobra Gold and are looking for other training opportunities in the coming months.

#### THE NAVAL RELATIONSHIP

¶18. (C) While our overall relationship with the Thai military is good, our links with the Royal Thai Navy (RTN) are not as strong as those with the Royal Thai Army or Air Force. The RTN is smaller than the other services and tends to be less willing to be open with U.S. counterparts. This has not been the case historically, and we are working to reverse the trend through projects like the Andaman Sea Maritime Security Initiative and the increased tempo of USN ship visits to Thailand. The April 19-24 visit of the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group was well received by the RTN, received front page and prime time media coverage, and was a successful opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of the U.S.-Thai security relationship.

¶19. (C) In addition to supporting our annual CARAT exercise with Thailand, JUSMAGTHAI has worked closely with RTN Special Warfare units to increase their capacity. USN SEALs have helped to provide their Thai counterparts with some impressive capabilities. For instance, Thai SEALs regularly conduct exercises aimed at protecting oil and gas platforms in the Gulf of Thailand. This NSW relationship was graphically demonstrated during the tsunami response when USN and RTN SEALs rapidly deployed to Phuket to assist in the recovery efforts. The Prime Minister was photographed in a recovery boat manned by the SEALs. Despite their improved professionalism, the Thai SEALs are not well-supported by senior RTN officials.

#### THE AIR FORCE RELATIONSHIP

¶20. (C) Our premier air force exercise with Thailand is Cope Tiger. Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) officials have disagreed with our suggestions to combine Cope Tiger with Cobra Gold -- and in fact have told us that they will not agree to move Cope Tiger and will plan to hold the exercise bilaterally with Singapore, or even invite a third country, if we insist on moving it. We are working closely with PACAF, MARFORPAC and PACFLT to develop a way to support the exercise.

¶24. (C) Although Utapao is an RTN facility, PACAF has been designated PACOM's executive agent in assessing what upgrades are needed there. Thai officers and U.S. officials in country agree that Utapao needs some safety enhancements in order to continue to be safe for us to use.

¶25. (C) Last year, Thailand announced its plans to replace aging F-5s in the RTAF fleet. We have urged Thailand to



either use its defense budget to perform mid-life upgrades (MLU) on its existing F-16s or to buy F-16 Block 52s. A vast majority of senior RTAF officers favor the F-16 over SU-30. However, Russian officials and Israeli contractors have reportedly offered inducements to senior RTAF officers to buy Russian and PM Thaksin has reportedly promised President Putin that he would look favorably on Sukhoi's bid. While the Government remains in caretaker status, the fighter deal is in suspense, but we suspect it will heat up again quickly after the elections.

#### INTELLIGENCE SHORTFALLS

¶26. (C) The RTA, RTN, and RTAF do not share intelligence effectively with each other or with RTSC or the MOD. Thai military analysts do not have access to intelligence from all sources and are slow in processing information. This is due not only to technical limitations -- although these exist -- but is also a result of institutional resistance among the services to sharing information. RTSC J2 has recently expressed interest in modernizing and harmonizing intelligence capabilities, but appears at a loss at how best to proceed. One possible avenue to explore would be for us to host more seminars for Thai intelligence officers from all services in order to break down the walls separating them and in order to enhance harmonization. Likewise, there are real opportunities to use our impressive exercise program to improve training for Thai intelligence officers. Most scenarios in our exercises simply deliver intelligence information already processed to game players.

¶27. (C) Given the intelligence stovepipes, it will be important in your meetings to tailor your remarks to each service. Insights and observations relevant to the Royal Thai Army, for instance, may be of little use to another service. Given the "Army-centric" nature of the Thai military, we see an opportunity to solidify intelligence sharing between USARPAC and the RTA. Some RTA officials have expressed a willingness to provide us their raw intelligence and analysis on the South if we could provide our critique of their analysis in return. We could use your assistance in understanding a legal way to enhance the USA-RTA intelligence relationship.

#### WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR VISIT

¶28. (U) We look forward to making your visit to Thailand a success.

BOYCE